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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: THE CHECHEN PRESIDENCY: KADYROV PROPOSES, BUT
PUTIN DISPOSES

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Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov, seeking to be president, is pushing hard against President Alu Alkhanov. Kadyrov aims either to force Alkhanov to make way for him and resign, or to persuade Putin to remove Alkhanov. Press articles inspired by one or another side appear frequently but should be taken as propaganda, not reportage. Nor do officials who claim to have insight know what is in Putin's mind. One apparent attempt to forge peace last November broke down. At that time, Chechen security forces loyal to Kadyrov killed Alkhanov supporter FSB Lt. Colonel Movladi Baysarov in Moscow. This appears to have frozen any resolution while the dispute rekindled. Now Putin must decide. He has backed Kadyrov without reservation so far, but must weigh the effects on regional stability as well as domestic and international politics. End Summary.

"You Would Find the Conversation a Trifle One-Sided"

¶2. (C) Chechen politics -- always murky, dirty and bloody -- are marked by unity in the face of outside attack and dissension once outside pressure is gone. Russian pressure on Chechnya is disappearing as the separatist threat fades, and Chechnya's leaders are going back to their internal power struggles. As we reported (Reftel), by November of last year Chechen PM Ramzan Kadyrov, newly turned 30 -- the minimum age to be president of Chechnya -- thought he had President Putin's agreement to step up to the presidency.

¶3. (C) But Putin first demanded peace between Kadyrov and current Chechen President Alu Alkhanov, according to Aleksandr Machevskiy of the Presidential Administration and, separately, Duma Deputy Gadzhi Makhachev (strictly protect both). Alkhanov was the figurehead of opposition to Kadyrov whose secret strong men were "East" Battalion commander Sulim Yamadayev and "West" Battalion commander Said-Magomed Kakiyev. Kadyrov talked to Gadzhi Makhachev in October of "getting rid" of Baysarov. Machevskiy strongly implied that the peace deal included a sanction for Kadyrov to assassinate former Chechen commander Movladi Baysarov, the overt face of the opposition -- a man hitherto protected by his status as an FSB Lieutenant Colonel. Baysarov was gunned down last November 18 by Chechen security forces with Moscow police looking on. Officially, he was shot while resisting arrest.

¶4. (C) The assassination -- with Chechen thugs blasting away on a main Moscow thoroughfare -- may have made Kadyrov too hot to be promoted. In contrast to Machevskiy, who told us the assassination did not bother him at all, Putin appears to have shelved plans to make Kadyrov president of Chechnya,

despite earlier promises. As Machevskiy put it December 21,
"That was yesterday; this is today."

Every Trick in the Book

15. (C) Kadyrov did not give up. Early this month Kadyrov resumed his pressure on Alkhanov to resign. His henchmen's public criticism included a charge of sacrilege against Kunta Haji, the founder of Kadyrov's brotherhood within Qadiri Sufism. The charge was not only meant to arouse public ire against Alkhanov and Kakiyev, who are adepts of the rival Naqshbandi sect, but also to split off their ally Sulim Yamadayev, whose family belongs to the Kunta Haji sect. Sulim's brother Ruslan told us February 13, however, that he and his brother recognized the charge as a cheap political ploy. Kadyrov is also insisting on holding a conference with Russian and international NGOs at the end of February, in an apparent effort to seek credibility.

16. (C) Though the renewed power struggle is gaining heat, the strong press play it is receiving should be treated with extreme caution. Both sides are inserting attack articles in Russia's notoriously corrupt press. For example, on January 23 Moscow businessman Malik Saidullayev, who bitterly opposes Kadyrov and tried to run against his father for Chechnya's presidency in 2004, detailed to us the killing of Baysarov -- in a conversation filled with some facts and a lot of fantasy. He charged that senior associates of Kadyrov (including Adam Delimkhanov, Kadyrov's right-hand man and Deputy PM for the Force Ministries) actually fired the shots. This may be true, but the fact that Saidullayev's charges appeared almost verbatim in the February 12-14 edition of "Novaya Gazeta" makes it probable that he paid for the

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article, whose other content must be suspect.

Only Putin Decides

17. (C) Ruslan "Khalit" Yamadayev (Protect), a Duma deputy who began our February 13 conversation by protesting that all reports of discord were inventions of the mass media and its Western masters, soon lamented the "terrible" state of affairs. "I can't even contact one part of my own leadership without irritating the others," he said. He believed the situation could not continue much longer without a resolution from Putin. He said Putin's word would be final with the Chechen people, who are tired of war and just want a normal, stable life. "If Putin says to Alkhanov, 'I want you in the MVD' (Ministry of Internal Affairs) and makes Ramzan President, the Chechen people will accept that. If Putin tells Ramzan to resign and go study in some institute, the people will accept that. If he sits both of them down and tells them he needs them both, the people will accept that. And if Putin tells them both to leave and brings in some sort of Jew or Avar, they will accept that, too."

18. (C) The Presidential Administration's Machevskiy was more categorical: "Alkhanov had his chances," he told us, "but he lost them." He expected Kadyrov to be named President soon.

Comment

19. (C) Our assessment is that Machevskiy was pretending to know more than he really did, while Yamadayev knew more than he let on. One thing is clear: the decision is with one man, Putin. Anyone he has told of that decision would keep very silent about it. Putin must weigh three factors in making a decision:

-- Success in imposing stability in Chechnya has depended heavily on Putin's unqualified backing for Kadyrov and defense of everything Kadyrov does. If Putin starts

qualifying that support, what will the effects be on Chechnya's stability?

-- Kadyrov, for all his effectiveness within Chechnya, clearly has wider regional ambitions. As the Baysarov assassination shows, he now views all of Russia as within his field of operations. If this continues, what will be the effects on stability in the wider North Caucasus?

-- Stability in Chechnya, however brutally it has been imposed, has virtually taken the conflict off the international agenda, and it is nowhere to be found on the domestic political agenda for the 2008 elections. Putin will be assessing the likely effects of his decision in these two vital areas.

At this point, we are making no predictions as to Putin's thoughts.

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